



LINKING RELIEF TO REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Ideas and Suggestions from European NGOs

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FOREWORD

By Paolo Dieci – CISP Deputy Director and Responsible for International Programmes

In April 2001 the European Commission presented a “Communication on linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD)”. While CISP and VOICE welcome this initiative, they note that the Communication was not focused on the practical or financial measures for its implementation.

Against this background CISP and VOICE decided to set up a working group directly involving European NGOs in order to strengthen the dialogue between NGOs and the Commission on the operational definition of the Link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development.

The working group has been formed to capitalise on the experiences of the wide variety of European humanitarian aid actors’ best practices which have been tested in the field, so that a Link can be made between Relief and Rehabilitation and so that the so called “grey zone” can be managed successfully.

While the theoretical framework for LRRD is well developed, the concept has not yet been “mainstreamed”. In addition, the common understanding of its practical implications has to be further developed by all those working in this field.

It is with this aim that the working group has drawn up a number of recommendations to be taken into account by both donors like ECHO, and by NGOs. These are based on the concrete experiences of EU Member States NGOs, which have been working in areas of the world where humanitarian and preliminary rehabilitation operations have been carried out.

This publication, which contains the working group’s (including those of CISP and VOICE) recommendations has greatly benefited from the answers supplied by VOICE’s NGO members to a “thematic questionnaire”. In this questionnaire NGOs were asked to give their opinions on both the theoretical and practical aspects of the LRRD issue.

This publication also contains four case studies based on the experiences of NGOs working in the field, which demonstrates how they were able to transfer the conceptual dimension of the LRRD into real situations.

Our aim is to strengthen the dialogue with the European Commission and the Parliament on the best instruments to be employed in order to build a bridge between Relief and Rehabilitation and Development in post crisis areas. It is a strong belief held by both the Commission and the NGOs that this theme, far from being of purely academic interest, represents a real priority for many third countries and hundreds of communities worldwide.

FIRST SECTION

LINKING RELIEF TO REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

VOICE Recommendations on the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development COM (2001) 153 ¹
by Paolo Dieci, Giovanna Brambilla, Giovanna Solari (CISP) and Olivia Lind Haldorsson (VOICE)

1. Introduction

VOICE welcomes the reassessment of EC policy and activities designed to facilitate and improve the linking of Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. Especially appreciated is the emphasis on flexibility, coherence and coordination, including decentralisation, as these elements constitute key factors for a successful linking. It should however, at all times, be noted that the rationale for these measures lies with the capacity of avoiding “grey zones” and gaps in transitional periods, and that specific procedures and tools need to be put in place in order to achieve this. Such specification is, according to VOICE, still lacking in the Communication. VOICE is therefore looking forward to the results of the assessment of budget lines and calls on the Commission to as soon as possible outline the specifics of the measures proposed in the Communication. This would include clarifying the distribution of mandates and tasks, the coordination tools as well as hand-over strategies, for example transition between decision-making procedures.

1.1. Definitions

Relief activities are, in general terms, aimed at responding to needs created by natural or man-made disasters. The basic and fundamental rationale of humanitarian assistance is to save human lives, to protect vulnerable groups and to respond immediately to needs.

On the other hand, the goal of Rehabilitation actions is to support the basis for a re-organization of demolished social and economic fabrics. Related activities should focus on the re-establishment of basic conditions for the re-launching of normal individual, social, cultural and institutional life. This does not necessarily mean that Rehabilitation programs have to re-establish services and social institutions exactly as they were before the emergency. In fact, in many cases, previously existing services are not sustainable in a post emergency context. Former Yugoslavia represents a concrete example of this situation. Therefore, the role of Rehabilitation projects is to support suitable conditions for the permanent delivery of basic services and the re-establishment of collapsed social structures, rather than creating a similar situation to the one existing before the emergency. With regard to Development, the definition is certainly more complex. To begin with, it would be useful to introduce a distinction between Development processes and Development projects. While a Development process is by its nature endless and depends on a number of different factors, including international relations and macro economic dynamics, a Development project should support, in a well-defined period of time, the achievement of concrete and measurable results.

2. Rationale and philosophy of LRRD

VOICE urges the EC to, at all different stages of intervention, take into account and strengthen measures that facilitate transition to, from and between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. These measures include, among other, local involvement and capacity building; prevention and preparedness and; de-mining.

¹ See website <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2001/com2001-0153en01.pdf>

2.1. Local involvement, prevention and preparedness

An important pre-condition for the establishment of a link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development is to build effective partnerships with local actors from the very beginning of operations. At the same time, this is certainly one of the most challenging tasks for northern NGOs. While European NGOs have a long tradition of partnership in third countries, it can not be ignored that, in many conflict areas, local interlocutors tend to be part of the conflict and, therefore, relying on them might result in a weakening or hampering of the principle of neutrality. Nevertheless, the implementation of emergency plans without significant involvement of local actors runs the risk of resulting in a culture of dependency. A high level of professionalism as well as a high capacity to analyse the local context is required in order to select local partners that are as much as possible detached from the conflict dynamics.

Clear strategies for disaster prevention and preparedness as well as conflict prevention should form part of tools and instruments, with emphasis on local capacity building. All tools should ensure that risk and vulnerabilities are included in planning, programming and implementation. Vulnerability and lack of and/or limited capacity to cope with natural disasters are associated with poverty and poor levels of Development. Therefore, civil society and local capacities should be reinforced at all stages in order to strengthen local coping strategies such as emergency preparedness and management.

2.2. Rehabilitation

NGOs involved in emergency situations generally tend to employ a medium and long-term perspective. NGOs are aware of that providing Relief without taking a broader view and thinking beyond the emergency phase, in the long run, might result in dependency on external assistance. There is therefore a need for a broad and comprehensive Rehabilitation strategy jointly adopted by all actors, including donors, international organisations, local institutions and NGOs. VOICE would like to commend the Commission's view that "in order to make the most of the linkage instrument, more emphasis should be placed on the restoration of institutional capacities and the rebuilding of the social fabric"².

This issue has been pursued by VOICE and other NGOs extensively, claiming that Rehabilitation must expand from being a purely physical reconstruction of infrastructure.³ A Rehabilitation line would necessarily have to include, and indeed place great emphasis on such activities, along with reconstruction of infrastructure. The protection of human rights, democratisation and conflict prevention should also be covered by a Rehabilitation budget line, so that those activities easily can be implemented. The Commission acknowledges that in conflict situations, the link between Relief and Development must be seen in a broader economic, social and political context. These factors should indeed be taken into account at all stages and interventions.

2.3. De-mining

VOICE welcomes the inclusion of anti-mines issues in the Country Strategy Papers and that they will be considered within the Development cycle of the country. De-mining must be streamlined into the whole process of linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development.

3. Co-ordination

VOICE welcomes and appreciates the recognition in the Communication of the need to improve international co-ordination mechanisms, and the mention of a pro-active approach. However, the Communication, in our view, fails to identify concrete measures to be taken in order to improve the Commission's capacity in this area. For instance, the "Friends of Approach", mentioned in the Communication, is not particularly well defined and does not in itself include practical and operational orientations.

² Commission Communication on "Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development" COM (2001) 153.

³ See for instance "The Essential Role of NGOs in the Reconstruction of War-torn Countries", VOICE Policy Paper September 21, 2000.

A concrete and effective coordination mechanism must be laid out, taking into account at least three elements: (i) an effective division of labour and responsibilities among different actors, in order to maximise the impact of different actions; (ii) the establishment of common criteria and methodologies avoiding the employment of different policies with regard to very critical aspects of emergency and post emergency response (a typical example would be the payment of salaries or incentives to local professionals operating in existing services); (iii) to link humanitarian and Rehabilitation efforts to the diplomatic initiatives addressed to solve the root causes of the emergency. This third consideration typically applies to conflict and to post conflict situations, where NGOs initiatives are “de facto” collocated within a broader international context.

4. Country Strategy Papers

A central pre-condition for the link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development is the possibility to plan programmes and strategies on a multi annual base. Without planning capacity, the linking between Relief and Rehabilitation is hampered and difficult to put into practice. In absence of long term planning, humanitarian assistance also runs the risk of becoming dependent on the dynamics of the emergency, particularly in conflict areas.

Ideally, EU external assistance should be able to propose to local interlocutors a well-defined strategy, including both Relief and Rehabilitation interventions and indicating at the same time a number of conditions that if not locally respected might result in the interruption of the strategy itself. In other words, NGOs feel that if the Commission was able to propose medium and long-term strategies, its capacity to positively influence the evolution of the local situation would be stronger.

The Commission hopes to incorporate Relief and Rehabilitation in already defined strategic frameworks by adopting amendments to the Country Strategy Papers. Although recognised as a good initiative, NGOs are concerned that this effort would not be coupled with appropriate procedures.

Well conceived strategies have often resulted in poor achievements due to procedural constraints. Therefore, NGOs would like to emphasise that this approach requires rapid and flexible amendment procedures. Otherwise there is a great risk that the process could result in further delays in the start of operations and limit the impact of interventions.

5. Decision-Making

5.1. Flexibility, Timing and “Trade-Off”

Flexibility is indeed a pre-condition for the linking of Relief, Rehabilitation and Development. However, flexibility does not mean absence of clear objectives or of concrete indicators to evaluate project performances. Flexibility rather means capacity of modifying methodologies and instruments in the light of changing environment in order to achieve the defined goal.

The discussion in the Communication on the trade-off between flexibility, speed and control is long-awaited and appreciated. VOICE fully supports the points of view of the Commission as regards to the difficulties in acting with “flexibility and quickly - while maintaining strong control and accountability”⁴.

This is especially relevant when it comes to interventions where the situation changes rapidly, and alterations need to be done in contracts in order to adopt to the new environment. VOICE therefore commends the Commission for allowing space for changes to project’s contents or location or accepting a failure to meet objectives or requirements concerning assets. Recognising this trade-off has the potential to truly make a change in terms of flexibility and timing as well as to contribute to relevant and meaningful interventions.

The call for flexibility should also take into account the timeframe of emergency aid, which should be appropriately adjusted to the situation by making solid assessments. Decisions should be realistic and well

⁴ EC COM (2001) 153.

informed, independently from for instance rigid exit strategies, but also taking into account the potential to incur dependence.

Several steps can be taken to limit the trade-off between flexibility, speed and control. As regards to controls, NGOs find ex-ante controls too time consuming, and thereby preventing timely interventions and flexible approaches. The Commission should instead implement rigorous and effective ex-post controls, carried out by well-trained staff, in order to minimise the trade-off.

By coupling ex-post controls to common evaluation and planning prior to interventions, the trade-off can be further minimised. When carrying out evaluation and planning of activities, it is imperative that the EC and NGOs use common, well-defined criteria prior to interventions, or at least in their very beginning, in order to avoid future misunderstandings. For example, a project supporting the return of IDPs typically includes reconstruction of houses. However, the ultimate goal of such an exercise would be the return of refugees; reconstruction merely represents a pre-condition for the achievement of this goal. A typical controversy would be how to evaluate a project that has successfully completed the physical reconstruction but has failed to create the environment to which refugees want to return or vice versa.

Moreover, a sounder base for decision-making can be ensured within a shorter time frame by capitalising on already existing know-how. In this respect, the EC should make sure that it does not repeat its failure to capitalise on existing know-how and structures already set in place, as illustrated by VOICE's case study on Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁵

5.2. Decentralisation

VOICE welcomes the specific reference to decentralisation of decision-making from headquarters to the field level. Decentralisation has indeed the potential to facilitate linking between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development, but only if it is implemented in a meaningful and well-informed way.

The rationale behind decentralisation stems from its prospective to enhance standards of political analysis based on vicinity to problems and changes in the environment; closer contacts with local government and beneficiaries and; the potential for more constructive cooperation and relations with international and local implementing partners.

VOICE therefore calls on the EC to allow for effective decentralisation by coupling it with real resources in terms of quantity and quality of staff and decision-making powers as well as measures to cooperate with other actors, but also to adopt simplified procedures, when they are duly justified by the existing circumstances.

The rationale for decentralisation is only valid if it allows functionaries to directly assess, in cooperation with its partners, the substantial impact of projects and make decisions based on these assessments. Moreover, the delegations have to be fully aware of the need for joint assessment and common analysis in cooperation with other donors, local governments and groups, its partners as well as other NGOs (local and international).

6. Tools and Instruments

6.1. Merging of Tools

VOICE welcomes the review of and possible merging of tools and instruments, hoping that this will lead to more coherency and efficiency without hampering flexibility and timing. It is, however, regretful that the Commission failed to produce such a review in time for the new LRRD Communication, since this would have strengthened both its credibility and usefulness. As regards to the creation of a Rehabilitation line, provisions need to be made to prevent uneven geographical distribution (due to political interests) and use of heavier procedures. Emphasis would need to be placed on flexibility and rapid decision-making, so as to avoiding the mistake illustrated by VOICE case-study on Bosnia, as regards to RRM (using slower

⁵ "The Missing link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development: The Grey Zone", VOICE Policy Paper February 2001.

procedures)⁶. An “open-ended” Rehabilitation budget line would also have the potential to solve the issue of “technical” grey zones, which appear due to slow reviews and internal procedures at Brussels level⁷. Most importantly, there would need to be clarity as to when such a Rehabilitation tool should be implemented and under which service.

A merger of horizontal instruments and thematic issues under geographical lines, will demand strong efforts in creating a “transition model” or “hand-over strategy” in order to ensure smooth transition, timely interventions, flexibility and provision for easy adaptation to changing environments. Such a model or strategy would outline in detail measures for coordination, coherence and streamlining between the different mandates and internal procedures. The Commission seems to be aware of this, but fails, once again, to specify the elements of such a “transition model” or “hand-over strategy”.

6.2. Call for Proposals

NGOs do not find the system of “Call for Proposals” appropriate for the financing of Rehabilitation operations. Firstly, this system has proved to be extremely time consuming, and therefore inconsistent with the rationale of the continuum. Secondly, Rehabilitation activities require a deep knowledge of the local context. Consequently, the Commission should select its partners taking into account who is doing what, how and where, rather than on the basis of a blind tendering process.

6.3. Mandate of ECHO

VOICE supports the Council’s view that ECHO should cover the period between emergency/Relief and short-term Rehabilitation and phase out, on the basis of exit strategy, in favour of other instruments as soon as possible. In this respect, VOICE would like to see a clarification regarding the main components that define the timing of withdrawal as well as the elements of “exit strategies”.

The Council’s recommendation that “ECHO should retain a flexible, case by case approach to prolong its support where a hand-over in the post-emergency phase is not easily possible”, is therefore welcome. The risk is related to the fact that, in absence of concrete alternatives and other possibilities of quickly funding the first Rehabilitation, the link between emergency and Rehabilitation operations is totally jeopardised. Therefore, such procedures need to be coupled with real resources in terms of ability to carry out assessments, by for example enhancing decentralisation in conjunction to decision-making powers and training of staff. As regards to flexibility and coherence, lately ECHO has been undertaking commendable efforts towards simplifying its relations with partners and aiming at greater coherency in decision-making procedures. However, these positive trends have been accompanied by worrying elements such as ECHO’s move to utilise parts of the Standard Contract in the FPA with its NGO partners. Such an undertaking, on a large scale, has the potential to slow down and encumber the delivery of humanitarian aid to beneficiaries and should be avoided at all costs. Moreover, ECHO’s steps to harmonise its procedures with those of other Commission bodies, appear to neglect the special nature of humanitarian aid, in that they must be apolitical and speedy.⁸

⁶ “The Missing link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development: The Grey Zone”, VOICE Policy Paper February 2001.

⁷ See for instance “Communication from NGOs on the new regulation for Aid to uprooted people in Asian and Latin American developing countries” May 2001.

⁸ For example ECHO’s move to abolish lump sum payments to NGOs in favour of real costs is a case in point. Lump sums are much lighter for an NGO to administer, and in the context of humanitarian aid operations of short duration, rightly so.

7. Conclusions

The European Commission has a long and fruitful experience of consultation and partnership with NGOs. This consultation has been a valuable asset for the joint definition of country strategies and policies, for example the Framework Partnership Agreement.

NGOs feel that it would be very useful to extend this consultation process to discussing the elements of the framework for the continuum/LRRD. Such a consultation would profit from a number of actors with excellent know-how and experience in implementing projects. Such an extended evaluation of experiences made in the field would allow for a practical approach to defining the best practice in linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development.

VOICE therefore suggests that the Commission and NGOs should engage themselves in creating consultative mechanisms in any emergency and post emergency area in order to:

- define medium and long- term strategies;
- establish common criteria for evaluating projects;
- establish common methodologies and tools;
- assess the effectiveness of the project;
- assess how the project fits within the wider political and diplomatic process.

In order to achieve this, we propose the creation of a “consultative group” in which both the Commission and NGOs are represented, with the aim of formulating a common approach to linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development.